



Petunia Patch

By Esther Taylor

Participaction-Eeek!

Esther Taylor used to write for the Toronto Telegram, the Guelph Mercury and the Acton Voice. This column was written in October of 1985, so pull up a chair and reminisce with The Petunia Patch.

There's a TV commercial extolling physical fitness that activates my innermost funny bone. Whenever I see and hear it, I want to curl up in a ball like a caterpillar and laugh weakly as I have been known to do in moments of great solemnity such as funerals. I have no control over this funny bone. From time to time, it has taken over since I was a kid. Unfortunately, it is not a kink one outgrows.

The government-sponsored ad stars a fat lazy rabbit who never walks when he can drive and a tortoise who follows all the acceptable rules for fitness. The indolent bunny lives for sleeping and eating while the tortoise jogs faithfully, does push-ups, and eats the right calories. The climax of this drama is a race, rabbit versus turtle. Who wins? The tortoise, natch. Fade-out chorus: "Participaction! Get with the action! Do it! Do it!"

I'm sure there must be thousands of red-blooded Canadians who are inspired by this commercial. It would be tragic if the government were wasting OUR money in a move to legislate physical fitness. However, there are contrary types like myself who act in reverse to the hard sell. While conceding the very real advantages of fitness, my sympathy is all for the fat, lazy rabbit. If you are born contrary, there isn't much you or the government can do about it.

I remember all the patriotic ballyhoo of Centennial year. I should have been busting out all over with love of country. But blame my innermost funnybone-I never felt less patriotic.

I just hankered to curl up like a caterpillar and laugh and laugh. The closest a friend and I came to getting into the spirit of our hundredth birthday celebrations was when we toyed with the idea of applying for a grant to learn how to swear in French. Alas. Nothing came of our bilingual impulse.

Youthful experiences may explain in part my reluctance to be transformed into a perfect physical specimen. I learned early in life that God had not designed me as an athletic human. At Sunday school picnics, I won only one race—a Time race. I was never picked for school baseball teams because I ducked the ball, even rubber spheres.

Gyms were unheard of during my public school years. Physical education known to my generation as "exercises" was not a priority item on the curriculum. We did our push-ups and knee-bends, such as they were, in the classroom where I distinguished myself as the kid who could not touch her toes. I still can't—without cheating.

Graduating to high school (actually Continuation School in the old stone building) we were exposed to PT that involved wands, clubs, and dumbbells manipulated between rows of desks in a minimum of space. I can still envision us in baggy middies and skirts going through our paces at risk of life and limb, especially those girls in my vicinity. Despite strenuous effort, I could not master any of the drills, and thus was never chosen to perform at Commencement and the At Home. Even the most optimistic teacher dared not risk turning me loose on the Town Hall platform armed with clubs or a wand. I was a total menace, with below-average coordination.

My frustration peaked annually in the fall when we held our field days on home turf and in Georgetown. Although I practised feverishly in our back garden, the only results were stiffness and a black mood that drove the rest of the family well nigh bonkers. During my high school years, I won not a single miserable ribbon, although my younger sisters garnered a few triumphs.

While working as a night operator for the telephone company in a Main and Mill corner building, I decided one summer that I would exercise nightly between calls. My motive: to lose weight as I was beginning to flap and bulge. I performed faithfully for a solid week clad only in briefs, it being a hellish hot summer. My calisthenics ended abruptly when I forgot that workers had cleaned the Venetian blinds that day and left some of the slats ajar. Answering a call from a pay phone, I heard a robust horrible masculine voice urging me, "Put your clothes on, you expletive-deleted THING."

In a rage, I grabbed a sheet from my night cot and prepared to stomp forth to battle through the front door. At the last second, discretion prevailed and I contented myself with adjusting the slats of the Venetian blinds below which a small audience had gathered. Thus in disgrace, ended my short stint of getting fit and slimmer.

I am too old now to jog and prance about keeping trim and alert. That's for younger, more coordinated Canadians, who like the tortoise revel in Participaction. Get with the Action. "Do it! Do it!" I have an affinity with the fat, lazy rabbit, who loses every race. He looks contented and happy, a condition not to be deplored even by our governors.



NAME CHANGE: More programming and no more fees for parents are just two of the changes to the Halton Hills Community Support and Information's parent and tot program at the Band Hall. The site has been designed as an Ontario Early Years Centre, but regardless of the name, the kids just want to have fun, including, front from left: Jordan Lenz holding Makayla Dee, Caleb Commandant, Christian Venditti, Darren Van Helden, Maddison Bannon and Austin Middleton. Back: Brianna McBurney, Matthew Bannon and Kent Tatton. — Frances Niblock photo

Grandma's words rang true



Angela Tyler

"You just wait. Your time will come." She said in between puffs from her smoke. I hear it echoing in my head more and more lately. They were the infamous words of Gwen Tyler, my grandmother.

She was about 75 at the time. My just over five-foot and shrinking with age grandmother with grey hair that had a patch of black at the front from years of smoking. I can still see her now. She's wearing her favourite patterned top and green pants. There is a cigarette dangling between her fingers while another one was still burning in the ashtray, her metal cane with its pronged end for ice in her other hand. She was irked at me again for another smart alec comment I had made.

With the youth in my eye and the feeling that I would never be that old, I had ignored her again. I brushed her comments off to her age. She didn't understand me. How could she, she was in her seventies. I was full of youth, and in hindsight, myself.

At the time, I never really knew what she meant by the comment. At times, I thought I was in trouble for something. The time that was com-

ing was around dinner when my dad got home from work. In a small town where everyone knows your family, it's hard to escape any mishaps that might have happened throughout the day. My immaturity assumed that time came immediately, not in the long term. Maybe she saw Susan, Maria, Megan and me skip grade 10 history to walk to Beckers for ice cream, which at the time was much more important. After all it was a sunny, spring day, much too nice to be in school learning.

However, with the fast approaching Acton High School reunion next year, my grandmother's words are taking on new meaning. Gwen, was a genius.

After the reunion website was published in the paper, I went online to check it out. Even though it has only been 15 years, it feels like an eternity. Fifteen years is just a drop in the hat. I've thought back to my dad's reunion a few years ago when he saw people he hadn't seen in decades.

Then I checked out the 'members' section. Here I went to my class year and registered. After, I checked out some of the other registrants. It was an odd feeling. People you spent years with were now a name you could click on to e-mail.

About a week after, I was taking pictures at the retirement party for the Hillier brothers. As we walked outside, a woman came over to me and said, "Angela." I stared blankly when she asked

again, "Angela Tyler." I had no clue who she was and politely asked if I knew her. It was a former schoolmate. She reminded me who she was, Lisa, told me about her kids, her husband, her job and asked about my family. My mind wandered to grade seven.

There I was in Mr. Bradshaw's grade seven homeroom. My seat was along the wall; hers was in the next row. In front of me was Haley Green. Haley was a smaller than average kid who was very smart and in an awkward stage. Lisa was a bit on the tough side and had taken to annoying Haley. Trying to be 'cool', I joined in. Not long after, I found my backside in the chair outside of the Principal's office. Later that week, my parents came in for their first parent interview, something my father said he only needed to do if there was a problem. I had become a problem. After the interview, I quickly returned to the un-cool group.

As Lisa talked to me like long lost best friends and giving me a hug, awkwardness came about me. An immature act that occurred over twenty years ago made me feel like hiding from Lisa and in an odd way, myself. Probably the same way Hayley felt in grade seven.

My grandmother was right. Although she probably had many interpretations for her words, my time did come in the immediate form as a youngster. However, it was resurrected with embarrassment and remorse today for how I acted then.



THE NEW TANNER

59 Willow Street North
Acton, Ontario L7J 1Z8
email: thenewtanner@on.aibn.com

(519) 853-0051 Fax: 853-0052

Publisher

Ted Tyler

Editorial

Hartley Coles

Frances Niblock Mike O'Leary Ellen Plehl

Maggie Petrushevsky Angela Tyler

Advertising and Circulation

Marie Shadbolt Bruce Cargill

Composing

Karen Coleman Ken Baker

Distributed to every home
in Acton and area as well as
adjoining communities.

ADVERTISING POLICY

Every effort will be made to see advertising copy, neatly presented, is correctly printed. The publisher assumes no financial responsibility for typographical errors or omissions in advertising, but will gladly reprint without charge that part of an advertisement in which an error may occur provided a claim is made within five days of publication.